

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL POSS DUPE

PAGE 01 OSLO 01224 01 OF 02 120927Z

10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 OSLO 1224

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SV, NO

SUBJ: SVALBARD WIVES ISSUE BUBBLES ALONG

REF: OSLO 0722 AND PREVIOUS

SUMMARY: THE NORWEGIANS ARE STILL WRESTLING WITH HOW TO RESPOND TO THE SOVIETS ON THE ISSUE OF SOVIET WIVES TRANSPORTED SUDDENLY TO THE AIRPORT AT LONGYEARBYEN, SVALBARD, LAST DECEMBER. THE SITUATION THREATENS TO BECOME A SERIOUS EMBARRASSMENT FOR THE GON AS THE NORWEGIANS ON THE ISLAND ARE BECOMING INCREASINGLY VOCAL IN THEIR CRITICISM OF GON'S HANDLING OF THE ISSUE. AS A RESULT, THE FOREIGN MINISTRY IS CONSIDERING GIVING THE SOVIETS A DEADLINE TO GET THEIR WIVES OUT OF THE AIRPORT OR FACE COURT ACTION AGAINST AEROFLOT. FORMIN FYRDENLUND, WHO HAS SEEMINGLY BEEN INCLINED TO HOPE THE ISSUE WOULD SOMEHOW DISAPPEAR, WILL PROBABLY SOON BE FORCED TO FACE THE ISSUE SQUARELY OR RISK STRONG DOMESTIC CRITICISM FOR HIS HANDLING OF IT. END SUMMARY

1. DCM REVIEWED STATUS OF SOVIET WIVES' CASE WITH RESPONSIBLE FORMINISTRY OFFICIAL BUCHER-JOHANNESSEN ON MARCH 9. BUCHER-CONFIDENTIAL
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PAGE 02 OSLO 01224 01 OF 02 120927Z

JOHANNESSEN ACCOMPANIED JUSTICE MINISTER VALLE ON HER VISIT TO SVALBARD TWO WEEKS AGO, SAME TRIP WHICH FRYDENLUND,

BECAUSE OF HIS ICELANDIC ENDEAVORS, WAS UNABLE TO MAKE (REFTEL).

2. BUCHER-JOHANNESSEN STATED THAT HE THINKS THE SITUATION ON SVALBARD HAS BECOME CONSIDERABLY MORE UNCOMFORTABLE FOR THE NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT. IN THE FIRST PLACE THE LOCAL GOVERNOR, MR. ELDRING, HAS BEEN SPEAKING OUT PUBLICLY WITH INCREASING FREQUENCY AND VOLUME IN CRITICISM OF FORMINISTRY'S HANDLING OF THE CONTINUED PRESENCE OF THE RUSSIAN WIVES AT LONGYEAR-BYEN AIRPORT. MOST RECENTLY ON MARCH 6, HE TOLD A LOCAL NEWS-PAPER "IT NOW LOOKS AS FI THE FOREIGN MINISTRY WILL LET THE WIVES TAY. SUCH AS BREACH OF CONTRACT MUST NOT GIVE THE RUSSIANS ADVANTAGES THEY OTHERWISE ARE NOT ENTITLED TO." BUCHER-JOHANNESSEN STATED THAT THE GOVERNOR'S CONTINUED PUBLIC CAMPAIGN HAS INFURIATED THE FOREIGN MINISTER WHO FEELS THAT INTERNAL GOVERNMENTAL POLICY QUESTIONS SHOULD NOT BE AIRED IN PUBLIC. BUCHER-JOHANNESSEN'S DISUCSSIONS WITH THE GOVERNOR DURING HIS VISIT TWO WEEKS AGO TO SVALBARD CONVINCED HIM THAT GOVERNOR IS VERY RIGID ON THE QUESTION OF THE WIVES AND DOES NOT WANT THE GOVERNMENT TO SEEK ANY KIND OF COMPROMISE WHATSOEVER WITH THE SOVIETS.

3. PERHAPS EVEN MORE IMPORTANT, SAID BUCHER-JOHANNESSEN, IS THE POSITION OF THE SVALBARD LOCAL COUNCIL THE UNIT RESPONSIBLE FOR ADMINISTERING THE NORWEGIAN COMMUNITY THERE. HE RECEIVED A PETITION FROM THE COUNCIL DURING HIS VISIT IN WHICH THE COUNCIL THREATENED TO PASS A RESOLUTION STRONGLY CONDEMNING THE SIVIET ACTION AND CALLING FOR A BIGOROUS NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT REACTION TO IT. BUCHER-JOHANNESSEN SAID THAT THIS COUNCIL THREAT INDICATED THE WIDELY HELD BELIEF AMONG NORWEGIANS ON THE ISLAND THAT THEIR GOVERNMENT WAS NOT REACTING WITH SUFFICIENT AUTHORITY TO THE SOVIET PROBE. HE NOTED THAT HE HAD BEEN ABLE TO PERSUADE COUNCIL TO DELAY ANY ACTION ON THE RESOLUTION FOR THE TIME-BEING BUT HE DOUBTS THAT THEY CAN BE HELD OFF MUCH LONGER.

4. FINALLY, BUCHER-JOHANNESSEN NOTED THAT THE MOST IMPORTANT LABOR UNION LEADER ON THE ISLAND ALSO STRONGLY CRITICIZES THE SOVIET ACTION AND FAVORS A VIGOROUS NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO IT.

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PAGE 03 OSLO 01224 01 OF 02 120927Z

5. ALL OF THESE INDICATORS, PLUS THE FACT THAT THE CONSERVATIVE PRESS HAS MANAGED TO KEEP ISSUE IN THE PUBLIC EYE(OSLO 1089), CONVINCED BUCHER-JOHANNESSEN THAT WITHIN FORESEEABLE FUTURE--A FEW WEEKS OR A MONTH--THE ISSUE COULD BECOME A SERIOUS POLITICAL PROBLEM FOR NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT. AS AN INDICATION OF CHANGING SITUATION IN PUBLIC MOOD IN NORWAY ON ISSUE, BUCHER-JOHANNESSEN SIAD THAT WHEN FRYDENLUND MET WITH THE STORTING FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE TO BRIEF THEM ON SVALBARD THREE WEEKS AGO, IT WAS MINISTER'S IMPRESSION THAT MOST

OF THE MEMBERS FEARED PUBLIC AT THAT TIME WOULD NOT SUPPORT A STRONG RESPONSE TO THE SOSVIETS BECAUSE OF THE EMOTIONAL ASPECTS OF EVICTING THE WIVES FROM AIRPORT. NOW, HOWEVER, BUCHER-JOHANNESSEN SAID, HE THINKS THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE WOULD PROBABLY SUPPORT A STRONG NORWEGIAN POSITION.

6. BUCHER-JOHANNESSEN STATED THAT FRYDENLUND STILL WANTS TO MAKE HIS TRIP TO SVALBARD AND THE MINISTRY WILL RECOMMEND TO HIM DATES IN EITHER MID-APRIL OR IN AUGUST. IN ADDITION, THREE OTHER MINISTERS WILL TRAVEL TO THE ISLAND BEFORE SUMMER AND A MAJOR GOVERNMENTAL STUDY IS UNDERWAY TO INVESTIGATE NORWEGIAN DEVELOPMENT OF THE SVEA COAL DEPOSITS

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 OSLO 01224 02 OF 02 150716Z

21

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INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00 INR-05 CIAE-00

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 OSLO 1224

LIMDIS

7. BUCHER-JOHANNESSEN FEELS THAT BECAUSE OF INCREASINGLY UNCOMFORTABLE SITUATION AMONG NORWEGIANS ON SVALBARD, TIME HAS COME FOR NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT TO GIVE SOVIETS FIRM DEADLINE FOR RESOLUTION OF WIVES ISSUE. IN RECENT CONVERSATIONS HE HAS CONDUCTED WITH SOVIET DCM, TITOV, BUCHER-JOHANNESSEN HAS OUTLINED SEVERAL POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES WHICH MIGHT RESOLVE THE WIVES ISSUE WHILE ALLOWING SOVIETS A FACE-SAVING WAY OUT. ONE POSSIBILITY WOULD BE FOR SOVIETS TO MOVE WIVES

TO THEIR COLONY AT BARENTSBURG. ANOTHER WOULD BE FOR THEM TO REDUCE COLONY AT BARENTSBURG. ANOTHER WOULD BE FOR THEM TO REDUCE OVERALL NUMBER OF PEOPLE THEY HAVE AT LONGYEARBYEN AIRPORT TO 7, WHICH THE NORWEGIANS WOULD AGREE COULD INCLUDE SEVERAL WIVES. IN RETURN THE NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT WOULD AGREE THAT WHEN HOUSING BECAME GENERALLY AVAILABLE TO THE NORWEGIAN FAMILIES AT LONGYEARBYEN, GON WOULD TAKE INTO ACCOUNT SOVIETS' DESIRE FOR ADDITIONAL HOUSING THERE.

8. BUCHER-JOHANNESSEN WILL RECOMMEND TO FRYDENLUND THAT HE GIVE SOVIET AMBASSADOR KIRICHENKO AN APRIL 1 DEADLINE BY WHICH TO RESOLVE PROBLEM. IF FRYDENLUND DOES THAT AND IF BY
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PAGE 02 OSLO 01224 02 OF 02 150716Z

APRIL 1 THERE IS NO RESOLUTION, THEN BUCHER-JOHANNESSEN WOULD EXPECT NORWEGIAN AIR AUTHORITY TO TAKE AEROFLOT TO COURT FOR VIOLATION OF THEIR HOUSING CONTRACT.

9. BUCHER-JOHANNESSEN NOTED THAT THERE IS CONCERN IN FOR-MINISTRY THAT IF THE NORWEGIANS ARE TOUGH WITH SOVIETS ON SVALBARD WIVES ISSUE, RUSSIANS MAY RETALIATE WITH RECIPROCAL RIGIDITY IN THEIR NEGOTIATIONS WITH NORWEGIANS ON LAW OF THE SEA MATTER AND DELIMITATION OF NORWEGIAN/RUSSIAN BARENTS SEA BOUNDARY. IN ANSWER TO A QUESTION, BUCHER-JOHANNESSEN STATED THAT SOVIETS HAVE TO DATE MADE NO SUCH THREATS.

10. COMMENT: BUCHER-JOHANNESSEN HAS ALWAYS URGED ON FORMIN-ISTER A TOUGH STANCE VIS-A-VIS RUSSIAN WIVES ISSUE. HOWEVER, EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT FORMIN FRYDENLUND IS UNCOMFORTABLE WITH SUCH A RESPONSE WHICH HE THINKS MAY THREATEN HIS DESIRE FOR GOOD OVERALL RELATIONS WITH SOVIET UNION. AT SAME TIME, AS AN EXPERIENCED POLITICIAN, FRYDENLUND MUST NOW SEE THE POTENTIAL DANGER TO HIS OWN POSITION IF NORWEGIAN PUBLIC SHOULD GET AROUSED BY WHAT IT PERCEIVES AS GOVERNMENTAL LAXITY IN DEALING WITH THE WIVES. FRYDENLUND'S RESPONSE TO THESE TWO CONFLICTING PRESSURES HAS BEEN A NEUTRAL ONE--HE HAS TRIED FOR THE PAST FEW WEEKS TO AVOID ISSUE ENTIRELY, ARGUING IN A RECENT MEETING WITH OUR AMBASSADOR THAT ISSUE WAS A "TECHNICAL ONE" WHICH SHOULD BE LEFT TO BUREAUCRATS AT WORKING LEVEL. FRYDENLUND IS ALSO ANXIOUS TO AVOID HAVING ANOTHER POTENTIALLY EXPLOSIVE ISSUE COME UP AT PRECISELY THE TIME HE IS UNDER HEAVY FIRE FROM NORWAY'S CONTINUED AID TO CUBA (OSLO 1036), AND WHEN HE MAY SOON BE FACED WITH THE POTENTIALLY DIFFICULT TASK OF STEERING NORWAY'S IEA ADHERENCE THROUGH THE STARTING (OSLO 1180).

OUR ASSESSMENT IS THAT UNLESS THE RUSSIANS LET HIM OFF THE HOOK SOON BY OFFERING AN ACCEPTABLE COMPROMISE, FRYDENLUND WILL HAVE TO RE-SOLVE HIMSELF IN THE ISSUE, PERHAPS EVEN TO THE DISTASTEFUL POINT OF CALLING IN THE RUSSIANS

AMBASSADOR TO GIVE HIM A DEADLINE. POSSIBLY FRYDENLUND
HAS CALCULATED THAT IF HE LETS THE ISSUE PERCOLATE, THE RESULT-
ANT PUBLIC CLAMOR FOR ACTION WILL STRENGTHEN HIS HAND IN
DEALING WITH THE SOVIETS ON THE ISSUE. BUT IT IS A HAZARDOUS
GAME, SINCE EVEN SEVERAL OF FRYDENLUND'S LABOR PARTY COLLEAGUES
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PAGE 03 OSLO 01224 02 OF 02 150716Z

HAVE TOLD US THEY ARE CONCERNED WITH THE AUDACITY OF THE SOVIET
MOVE. CERTAINLY, THE OPPOSITION NON-SOCIALIST PARTIES ARE
WATCHING VERY CAREFULLY IN THIS PRE-ELECTION YEAR TO SEE
HOW THE LABOR GOVERNMENT HANDLES WHAT IS GENERALLY RECOGNIZED
AS A DIRECT CHALLENGE TO NORWEGIAN AUTHORITY ON SVALBARD.
END COMMENT.
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